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AUTHOR:

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TITLE:

YOUTH OF VERGIL

PLACE:

S.L.

DATE:

[1915]

Master Negative #

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CC:9668 BLT:am DCF:? CSC:? MOD: SNR: ATC: UD:08-21-91
CP:nyu L:eng INT:? GPC:? BIO:? FIC:? CON:???
PC:r PD:1991/1915 REP:? CPI:? FSI:? ILC:???? MEI:? II:?
MMD: OR: POL: DM: RR: COL: EML: GEN: BSE:
040 NNC+cNNC
100 10 Conway, Robert Seymour,†d1864-1933.
245 14 the youth of Vergil†h[microform]:†ba lecture delivered in the John Ry
ands Library on 9 December, 1914.†cby R. S. Conway.
260 [s.l.,†bs.n.,†c1915].
300 28 p.†c26 cm.
LDG OCLC
QD 08-21-91

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TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mm REDUCTION RATIO: 11x
IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA IA IB IIB
DATE FILMED: 9/18/91 INITIALS MED
FILMED BY: RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS, INC WOODBRIDGE, CT

THE
YOUTH OF VERGIL

A LECTURE DELIVERED IN THE JOHN RYLANDS
LIBRARY ON 9 DECEMBER, 1914

BY

R. S. CONWAY, LITT.D.

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Reprinted from "The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library"

July, 1915

THE YOUTH OF VERGIL.¹

BY R. S. CONWAY, LITT.D.

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MANCHESTER.

IN other lectures delivered in this Library an attempt has been made to consider, in the light of the events of Vergil's time, the view which the poet gives us of different sides of human experience, such as the relation of Man to Nature, or the conception of an ideal sovereign. Our inquiry was then based upon what he wrote at the time of his fullest power; the *Georgics* having been begun probably in his thirty-fourth year, and published in his forty-first, and the *Aeneid* having been left unfinished at his death ten years later.

The object of the present lecture is a more difficult, and, in seeming, perhaps a less fruitful endeavour, to frame, if we can, some picture of the development of Vergil's thought before he set himself to any national task. For this is the great difference between the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid* on the one side, and almost all the poet's work that preceded them on the other. Both the two great poems have national, or more than national scope. All those which precede them—if we except the IV and V Eclogues, exceptions which we shall see really prove the rule because they mark a transition—are in a sense private performances. Yet just for this very reason the poems of this date have an interest of their own, just because in them Vergil had that greater freedom which belongs to an artist not yet widely known. Youth has its privileges of free experiment, of moods shifting between daring invention and gentle, playful loitering in old ways, between fervent outpouring, where the new spirit breaks into vehement almost violent utterance, and studies modelled humbly upon the work

¹ A Lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on December 9, 1914. In printing it I am deeply indebted to the kind and searching criticism of my friend Prof. W. B. Anderson.

of others, where the poet's chief ambition is to represent in a new material the work of some older master. Such a period is difficult to study, because one is apt to judge the work of early years by the work of the artist's maturity, and hence to think little of passages admirable enough in themselves, because they fall short of what came later. Another difficulty must be faced in the case of a poet who, like Vergil or Shakespeare, so far outshone in the end every one of his contemporaries that the student finds it difficult to believe that his early work may have been deeply indebted to the encouragement and example of some of the very writers whose fame was destined to be completely eclipsed by his.

Vergil in his youth was one of a group of writers full of poetic ambitions; Varius, Cinna, Varus, Tucca, Pollio, and Vergil's own bosom-friend Gallus, to mention no others, were all writers of verse; but the economy of the centuries has swept away every trace of the big or little books of all these poets, except that from Gallus one interesting poem has been preserved, because it had come to be bound up with some of the early writings of his greater friend. In this case, therefore, we have, as we shall see, a basis for comparing Vergil's work with that of one of his contemporaries; but the rest is silence. We know nothing of the authors of the other non-Vergilian poems bound up with some genuine ones in what is called the *Appendix Vergiliana*.¹ Nor do we even know (I wish we did) the people whom Vergil has represented in some of his earlier poems as conversing or competing with himself. If we did, we should begin to understand the *Eclogues*; and if we only understood them, they would be among the parts of Vergil's work read with the keenest interest.

That brilliant scholar Prof. Franz Skutsch of Breslau, who died two years ago, had lived long enough to open an entirely new path for study by explaining for the first time the meaning of two of the most difficult of the *Eclogues*, VI and X, and indeed VIII as well. He showed² that as continuous poems they had practically no meaning at all, just as much and as little as the bibliography of a poet in a catalogue. For centuries scholars and schoolmasters have been

¹ In what follows I have generally accepted Ellis' text.

² In the volumes entitled "Aus Vergil's Frühzeit," Leipzig, 1901 and 1905.

hammering away in the desperate effort to discover a story where there is only a series of subjects of stories, and a romance in what is only a description of the plots of many romances; and the unfortunate schoolboy, fed upon such husks, naturally deemed the author of the stuff that needed the incredible explanations offered to him a creature past finding out and certainly not worth finding. Well, we may hope that no more schoolboys will be tormented with the effort to discover in *Eclogues* VI and X anything but friendly metrical catalogues of the different poems which Gallus had written. But the rather sorry story of the study of these two poems must warn us against assuming that the other *Eclogues* are intelligible with no better means of interpretation than we at present possess. In the first *Eclogue*, for example, what scholar has or ever had the remotest credible notion who Amaryllis was, or who Galatea, or why Tityrus should be represented as having been set free from slavery after he became the possession of Amaryllis instead of Galatea, or what kind of possession of him was ever claimed by these ladies, if they were creatures of flesh and blood at all. Here we have an example of a well-known passage of three lines¹ which is totally unintelligible; but which has been interpreted and translated with sublime stupidity for some nineteen centuries by people who would not confess their ignorance.

We have strayed, perhaps, rather far from the purpose immediately before us, that of defining the period of Vergil's poetic life which we are now to consider; but perhaps the digression is not wholly irrelevant. It will at least show that the work that Vergil published before he was thirty needs a good deal of study, and it will also serve to explain why this lecture will invite attention especially to the earlier, indeed the boyish work of the poet, written between his sixteenth and his twenty-fourth years. If we can view this in its proper perspective, it may tell us something of the growth of that wonderful boy's spirit. But we must proceed with caution, because in the bundle of poems in which this juvenile work of Vergil is included, there are a certain number which it is quite certain cannot possibly have been written by Vergil himself. Examples are the poem addressed to Messala, the leader of a coterie which was in

¹ *Ecl.* I. 31-3.

some ways the rival of that of Mæcenas; and the lament for Mæcenas, called by his name and written after his death and therefore long after Vergil's, by some young writer who tells us frankly that he could not claim to be called a friend of the great patron. In these circumstances the rule that must guide us is to disregard for the purpose of any serious argument all the poems except those which fulfil two conditions; they must bear some distinctive trace of Vergil's manner, and they must contain no passage which for any clear reason it is difficult to attribute to him. These tests still leave us, I think, some four or five poems which we may confidently attribute to Vergil, notably the *Culex*, which we will shortly consider; the *Moretum*, or "Farmer's Salad" a curiously interesting genre picture of rustic life;¹ three charming little epigrams on Priapus, the god of gardens; and two not less charming autobiographical poems, which if they were not written by Vergil were certainly written by some poet trained in precisely the same style and breathing the same gentle spirit. Of those about which doubt is possible, the picture of the tavern-hostess, known as the *Copa*, is the most important, and the internal evidence² for its Vergilian authorship, I confess, seems to me rather difficult to disregard.

Beyond and after these stands the delightful poem of the transition, the climax to which Vergil's earliest poetic ambitions brought him, only to disclose that even so he had barely realized his power. This was, of course, the IV Eclogue,³ which partly by accident but more by nature blossomed into a peculiar sanctity and lent to its author the title and influence of an inspired Christian teacher.⁴ Some of the chief features of the poetry of this Eclogue we shall be able, I think, to trace in course of growth; and we shall recognize that that wonder-

¹ Mr. J. W. Mackail writes of this (*Class. Rev.* XXII. (1908), p. 72): "The internal evidence for the Vergilian authorship is so good that it would require but little external support".

² See below, p. 26.

³ This dates from 40 B.C. The Fifth was written some two years sooner, probably at the celebration of Julius Cæsar's memory on his birthday in July, 42. The mourning of Rome for his assassination is represented by the sorrow of the rivers and the forests for the fair shepherd Daphnis. Did ever a young poet approach a grave theme by steps more shy?

⁴ See *The Messianic Eclogue of Vergil* (Mayor, Fowler & Conway; published by John Murray, 1907).

ful poem is not an isolated curiosity, but like the flower which follows a morning of spring sunshine upon a bank of violets in bud.

Let us take, as a kind of background to our view, the poem already mentioned, once attributed to Vergil but now clearly shown to be the work of his friend Gallus. This miniature epic, called the *Ciris*, which contains some 540 lines, is dedicated to Messala, and tells the story of Scylla of Megara. This lady, as the poet points out in thirty or forty lines, is to be carefully distinguished from the more famous Scylla who was the neighbour of the whirlpool Charybdis and whose gentle way it was to lie in wait in the cliffs of Sicily to prey upon sailors as they passed. This, the Homeric Scylla, is of course only some old-world sailor's picture of a tropical cuttle-fish: but the Scylla who is the subject of the *Ciris* was the daughter of Nisus, the King of Megara, on whom Minos, King of Crete, was making war. Now this Nisus held his throne by a tenure which a modern monarch would think peculiar, but which is familiar to us in the folklore of many lands. He had a rose-coloured lock of hair in the middle of his head, and so long as this remained uncut, his kingdom also was destined to remain safe. Unluckily for him, his only daughter Scylla fell in love with the invader, King Minos, though how she came to set eyes upon him the poem does not tell us, beyond the fact that Scylla had somehow offended Juno and that Juno sent Cupid to kindle in her a passion for Minos. Contrast this with the First Book of the *Aeneid* and remember the perfectly natural and credible way in which the growth of the passion of Dido for the stranger king Æneas is traced. But in Gallus' poem, however Scylla's love began, she becomes at once its hopeless victim; she wanders, or rushes, through the city like a bacchante or a priestess of Cybele, not stopping—so we are told—either to perfume her hair or put on slippers or necklace, but continually making excuses to go to the walls to watch the Cretan army, of which Minos is in command. She cannot spin or weave or play the psaltery; her cheeks lose all their colour, and she is sure that her despair will kill her. 'She sees rotten-little death creeping over her flesh,' so the poet describes¹ her condition. But she at once thinks of the expedient of cutting off the fatal lock from

¹ *Tabidulamque videt labi per viscera mortem* (l. 182). The diminutive adjective is perhaps less absurd in Latin than in the nearest rendering possible in English, but it is every whit as undignified.

her father's head and sending it to Minos as a means both of introducing herself to him and of securing his affection. Here the poet inserts¹ a few lines of prudent but (where they stand) rather prosaic digression, suggesting that perhaps after all she was ignorant of the fatal effect that the cutting of this lock would have upon her father's fortunes; but he does not stay to consider why, if she did not know this, it should ever have occurred to her to send such a curious present to the prince whom she wished to attract as a suitor. Young ladies are not wont to send locks of their father's hair to strangers as tokens of their affection, so far as my experience goes. Without solving this difficulty the poet proceeds, in fifteen lines, to prophesy the ultimate fate of Nisus and Scylla, viz. to be changed into birds. And by way, we may suppose, of relief to this somewhat lugubrious prospect, he calls upon all the creatures of the air who ride upon the clouds or traverse the sea and the forests—the lines are undeniably pretty—to 'rejoice that their number is to be increased by this royal pair,' Nisus and Scylla, for they will augment the number of princely kinsmen and creatures of their own rank who have been turned from human beings into birds, of whom particular specimens are mentioned. Why the birds, whether originally human or not, should be so pleased about the new arrivals, does not appear; but apparently there was no doubt about it in the poet's mind, because he repeats the word *Rejoice* three times over. This curious diversion of the narrative is thoroughly in the Alexandrine style, giving the poet an opportunity of showing his knowledge of mythical ornithology, and linking up his own particular myth with several others of the same kind, a process with which, on a vast scale, most of us are tolerably familiar in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Coming back to his story, the poet proceeds to another type of composition beloved of Alexandrine and later poets, namely an interview between a heroine and her confidante. Scylla rises at night, scissors in hand, to attack her father's head; but she is caught on the way by her old nurse, who after scolding her in twenty-four heroic lines throws a cloak over 'chilly-little' Scylla's 'saffron-

¹ I cannot resist the suspicion that these lines (185-89) are Vergil's; they are marked by most Vergilian pauses (see below, p. 9 footnote) and some Vergilian diction. If so, were they written by him as a suggested beginning for a new turn to the story? In l. 190 *Tu* must surely be right for the *Heu* of the (XV-cent.) codices.

coloured night-dress'; and after another 100 lines of conversation puts her back into bed, taking care to extinguish the light by turning its wick upside down. Then she stays gently patting Scylla to quiet her, and sits up beside her all night 'bending over her chilly-little eyes, propped up on her elbow'. This thrilling scene has filled altogether 150 lines. In the morning the nurse persuades Scylla to try magic arts in the hope of persuading Nisus to make peace. They, however, are all exhausted in thirty lines, and then the nurse joins in the original plot. But after this, the story begins to gallop at breakneck speed: in no more than four lines Nisus is robbed of his rosy lock of hair, his city captured, and Scylla carried off (presumably by Minos, though we are not told how) and dragged through the sea by a rope attached to one of the ships. This passage is most characteristic of the author's manner.

'Again, therefore, Scylla becomes the foe of her father's head; then the lock of hair which blossomed with Tyrian purple is cut; then Megara is taken and the oracles of the gods made good; then the maiden, daughter of Nisus, suspended in strange fashion from the tall ships, is dragged through the blue sea.'

Clearly our narrator can make up for lost time when he chooses. Having got his heroine thus speedily into the water, what does it occur to him to say next? No modern reader could guess.

'A great number' of nymphs admire her in the water. Father Ocean admires her, and fair Tethys, and Galatea, hurrying her eager sisters along. The nymph, too, who is wont to traverse the great seas with a team of fishes, and a sea-green car of two-footed horses, Leucothea, and the little Palaemon beside his divine mother. Also the two gods whose destiny it is to live alternate days, the dear offspring of Jupiter, his great sons, the children of the daughter of Tyndareus;² they too admire the maiden's snowy limbs.'

But this admiration is quite platonic; not one of all this menagerie of sea-gods lifts a finger or a flapper to help her.

That is how the poet of the *Ciris* comports himself at the tragical climax—he simply runs away from it. Indeed "runs" is too weak a word—he bolts. And then he takes refuge behind a whole warehouse of mythological furniture. This stuff serves to fill sixteen lines

¹ *Complures*, the most prosaic of all possible epithets.

² That is, Castor and Pollux, described in only four different ways.

devoid of any trace of naturalness or pity. Then suddenly we come upon two which strike a note from a different world.

Raising to heaven, poor maid, her burning eyes,
Her eyes, for bonds held fast those tender hands.

No lovers of Vergil will need to be told who wrote these lines¹ or why we have a sudden outbreak of feeling in the midst of a frigid piece of Alexandrine fantasy.

There follows an oration of some fifty lines, the variations in which are hardly less remarkable. Scylla begins with a request to the winds to keep quiet for a little while she speaks; and then turns to a careful account of her own kinship with them according to the best mythology. Minos is then denounced for having broken his bargain with her (though we have never been told when the bargain was made). Then come a few lines (418-24) of penitence naturally and feelingly worded, succeeded by rhetorical self-reproaches in which she dwells on the luxury and artistic adornment of her father's palace, sacrificed by her in order to befriend Minos.

'The rich palace with its delights did not move me, with its frail coral and tear-like gems of amber, nor all the crowd of attendant nymphs of my own age. Love conquers everything; what would he not have conquered? My temples will not now be moist with rich myrrh, nor will the bridal pine-torch kindle for me its chaste flame; nor will my bedstead be of ivory nor spread with Assyrian purple rugs. These are great complaints; nor will even the earth, common mother of all things, bury her foster-child with a handful of sand.'

Gallus clearly flattered himself on a knowledge of feminine taste; and at the critical points of the tragedy, here as before,² he leaves room in his heroine's thoughts for these grave matters of toilet and furniture!

When the speech is ended we have a geographical description in twenty lines of the places which the ship passes, for an Alexandrine poet was always expected to display a knowledge of geography. The last seventy lines give the metamorphosis, carefully narrated. Scylla and her father are turned into a pair of birds, Scylla becoming the Ciris, or osprey, and her father the Haliaetus, a larger kind of sea-eagle.

¹ *Aen.* II. 405-6, where the order has been made more pointed, with two other slight improvements.

² Ll. 167-70; see above, p. 5. The detail is thoroughly Alexandrine, as Prof. W. B. Anderson reminds me; cf. *Apoll. Rhod.* III. 828 ff.

Even this brief description of the framework of the poem will, I hope, have been enough to suggest, if not to prove, that it is quite impossible¹ to attribute any but occasional parts of it to Vergil; and in fact we have definite ground for believing that it was not written by him but by his intimate friend Gallus. For in a note on Eclogue X (l. 46) Servius remarks that 'all these lines,' presumably those in the context, 'are taken from the poems of Gallus'; and a little farther on (ll. 58, 59) we have two striking phrases which appear in the *Ciris* (ll. 196 and 299).

And again in Eclogue VI, which, no less than the Tenth, as Skutsch has shown,² is a catalogue describing a number of different poems, there are four lines allotted to Scylla, the daughter of Nisus. More than three of them are taken up with distinguishing her from the Homeric Scylla and are taken directly from the Preface to the *Ciris* with the change of a single epithet. These lines in the sixth Eclogue follow immediately two in which the poet is instructed to sing about 'the origin of the Grynean grove'; on which Servius remarks that this was the title of 'the poems of the Alexandrine writer, Euphoriion, which Gallus translated into Latin'. We know that the poems of Euphoriion consisted of bits of mythology worked up into miniature

¹ Let me add two confirmatory points of a definite nature which to some minds may be more convincing than any general estimate of poetic character. The first is the use of several words which appear nowhere in the works certainly attributed to Vergil, e.g. the two diminutives *frigidulus* (ll. 251, 348) and *tabidulus* (l. 182); the Greek words *sophia* (l. 4), *peplos* (l. 21), *thallos* (l. 376); and the colloquial use of *nulla* (l. 177) for *nunquam*. The second point is one which will appeal especially to those who have been through the discipline of composing Latin hexameters, the remarkable frequency of long stretches of the *Ciris* with no pauses, or very few, anywhere except at the end of the line. Thus in the first eleven lines there are no pauses at all elsewhere; in the next ten only three, and those very slight; in the next twenty only five. Similarly in ll. 72-88 there are very few except at the end of a line, and there is a pause at the end of every one of them. The same monotony appears in Catullus' hexameters. But even in the most youthful work of Vergil the variation of the pauses is marked, and in fact this part of Vergil's technique is not the least beautiful of his gifts to Latin poetry. And in the lines which we noted in the *Ciris* as being possibly, for other reasons, due to Vergil (418-24) there are no less than seven pauses at other points than the end; and so in 403 and in 185-89.

² See p. 2 footnote.

epics, just of the type which the *Ciris* represents; and it is quite natural that in describing another of the poems from this book, the story of Philomela, Vergil should use one line (81) which appears almost wholly in the *Ciris* (51). This definite information from Servius has been made by Skutsch the basis of a careful and convincing analysis of several of the Eclogues of Vergil which have to do with Gallus and contain quotations from the *Ciris*. The practice of complimenting a poet by summarizing his poem and giving a line or two from it was familiar in the poetical circles of Vergil's youth; and other examples are Ovid's memorial poem on Tibullus (*Amores* III. 9) and Statius' birthday poem on Lucan (*Silvae* II. 7).

Before we leave the *Ciris* it is worth while to notice some of the changes that Vergil made in the lines he took over. The treatment which the Homeric Scylla gave to sailors is described thus by Gallus (*Cir.* 61):—

deprensos canibus nautas lacerasse marinis

quite a compact line, marching straight to the outside of the fact. But when Vergil changes (*Ecl.* VI. 77) the mechanical *deprensos* into *a! timidos* a new note of both dramatic and pathetic intensity is suddenly introduced. And in the same Eclogue (l. 81 = *Ciris*, l. 51) we have another change to exactly the same purpose in the substitution of *infelix* for an adjective of mere colour (*caeruleis*).

On the other hand four lines taken over without any change are among those which the schoolboy finds among the hardest in the *Georgics*, because their connexion with the context in which they stand is implied rather than indicated—the lines describing the pursuit of the osprey by the sea-eagle, supposed to re-enact the vindictive pursuit of Scylla by her father, which appear in the list of signs of fine weather (*Georgics* I. 406-9). They come from the conclusion of the *Ciris* where of course they are more in place. These examples, besides their intrinsic interest, give valuable evidence of the priority of the *Ciris*; and there are a great number of others.¹

¹ I may be permitted to quote here a few sentences in which Mr. J. W. Mackail (*Class. Rev.* XXII. 1908, p. 69), expresses his own conclusions in the light of Skutsch's discovery:—

"That the *Ciris* is the work of Gallus, to something of the same extent as the Eclogues are the work of Vergil, we cannot, I think, in view of the whole evidence reasonably doubt. But the two young poets were not

From this brief survey of the work of Vergil's friend and companion we turn to the earliest poem of Vergil himself. The *Culex* is a poem of 413 lines, which, according to a strongly confirmed tradition (Donatus, *Vita Vergilii*, 17), he wrote when he was sixteen years old, i.e. in the year 54 B.C. Before testing this tradition let me give some account of the poem. The subject, as the title implies, is the story of a gnat (or mosquito), a curious theme for a poet even in his teens. But no one who has realized the delight with which in his *Georgics* Vergil dwells on the life of the smallest creatures, swallows and flycatchers, ants and bees, field mice and moles, will think it strange that the boy's imagination should have been caught by so common a feature of shepherd's life in Northern Italy as the swarms of gnats that 'possess the misty tracts of woodland and green forest' (*Culex*, 22). Pales, the goddess of flocks and herds, is invited to take an interest in the story and to bless the poet while he moves, like the gnat, 'midway between the valley and the stars'—a pretty conceit which would appeal to a clever schoolboy, as describing in the same phrase the free, swift, airy movements of the tiny creature, and the range of his own poetic ambition between humble subjects natural only linked by a close friendship, and inspired by common aims and enthusiasms. They worked at their art together. . . . Coleridge in later years gave a statement of what he had contributed to Wordsworth's pieces, and Wordsworth to his, in the Lyrical Ballads. . . . The poems came into being through the interpenetration of genius between the two: their authors were the Wordsworth who was influenced by Coleridge, and the Coleridge who was influenced by Wordsworth. Such, or of such a kind, was the relation between Vergil and Gallus. And this would be true even if it were the case that the sensuous, brilliant, erratic Gallus was as far below Coleridge in essential poetic genius as the brooding, solitary Vergil was above Wordsworth.

" . . . We may trace, I think, in the *Ciris* a genius that had developed faster than Vergil's, that was more quick and alert. It is the common case of early brilliance which shoots ahead, but soon comes to its limit. . . . The author of the *Ciris* seems to write with ease and to have a great natural gift of imitating the style of his predecessors. The *Ciris* begins with four lines which are pure Catullus, followed by a dozen which are pure Lucretius. The first fifty lines are indeed throughout a brilliant exercise or variation in a synthesis of these two styles. Then the Vergilian note comes in for the first time, in half a dozen lines (48-53) which are full of Vergilian phrases [and of Vergilian pauses.—R.S.C.]. It is as though Vergil himself had sat down by Gallus and guided his pen, or as though Gallus had suddenly felt and begun to reproduce Vergil's own melody and phrasing."

to a farmer's son and the heights of poetic achievement represented by the stars.¹

Here are the opening lines roughly rendered ; they are simple and here and there quite prosaic in diction :—

We have played in verse, Octavius, with the Muse,
The homely Muse of country festivals
Framing the song, and like a tiny spider
Shaped our first cobweb ; now the play is done.
The Gnat shall be its name ; so shall the line
Of playful story fear no jealous eye,
But run in time with truth, and win thy praise.

¹ These forty lines exhibit in their structure a rather interesting parallel to the exordium of the *Georgics*, which is of much the same length (42 lines). In both Prefaces the passage invoking the help of rustic deities of both Greek and Italian origin (12 lines in the *Culex*, 18 lines in the *Georgics*) is put in the middle, between passages which to a modern reader seem more directly relevant. For in each case the opening lines (11 in the *Culex* and 5 in the *Georgics*) give the name and purpose of the poem with the name of the person to whom it is dedicated ; and the concluding passage (17 lines in the *Culex* and 19 in the *Georgics*) explains the special claim of the subject to the help of the chosen patron. This parallelism is of particular interest to me, because if we are satisfied, as I hope we shall be, of the Vergilian authorship of the *Culex*, it supplies a confirmation of the interpretation which I have suggested (*Class. Association Proceedings*, Manchester, 1906, p. 35) for the address to Cæsar in this part of the *Georgics*. It is the passage in which the question is asked what kind of deity Cæsar will assume ; whether he will be a god of earth or heaven or sea or of the underworld, and this has given great trouble ; some commentators, indeed, have turned their own puzzlement into an excuse for deriding the poet. The puzzle becomes clear, I venture to think, so soon as one sees that the four alternatives are really literary ; that is to say, the question which the poet of the *Georgics* is really asking is what kind of subject he shall choose for the poem which Cæsar is to patronize. Shall he write on Astronomy or Agriculture or Exploration oversea or the life of the After-world ? All were subjects on which other authors of his time were busy, and the last was that to which he himself felt a paramount attraction all through his life, and to which at length he devoted the greatest Book of the *Aeneid*. Now in the dedication of the *Culex* to a boy whose name is Octavius, the first paragraph, as we have seen, mentions him by name only, but, just as in the *Georgics*, the third paragraph tells us also what other subjects the poet might have chosen, but does not think fit for a poem dedicated to him ; he will not write of war, such as that between Zeus and the giants, or that of the Centaurs ; nor of the feat of Xerxes in cutting a canal through Mount Athos or building a bridge over the Hellespont ; nor of the invasion of Greece by the Persians. Is not this parallelism of structure remarkably close ?

For whoso thinks to blame the Muse's jest,
We will account him lighter than the Gnat
In both his name and person. But one day
This playful Muse will speak in deeper tones,
Pruning her poems to be worth your heed,
If changing times can make my toil secure.

Lusimus, Octavi, gracili modulante Thalia,
atque, ut araneoli, tenuem formauius orsum ;
lusimus : haec propter Culicis sint carmina dicta,
omnis ut historiae per ludum consonet ordo
notitiae : doctumque uoces, licet inuidus adsit.
quisquis erit culpae iocos Musamque paratus,
pondere uel Culicis leuior famaue feretur.
posterius grauiore sono tibi Musa loquetur
nostra, dabunt cum securos mihi tempora fructus,
ut tibi digna tuo poliantur carmina sensu.

After the Preface one of the three characters of the rustic drama, the Shepherd, is introduced to us, driving his flock of goats out of their sheepfold to the pasture near the top of the mountain where 'the sunny sward covers the spreading hills'. When the shepherd appears the sun has just risen, filling the sky with wonderful colours, and at midday the flock find their way down into the valley, with its many-hued and many-scented plants pleasant for the reader to imagine and for the sheep to nibble ; some of the sheep take the opportunity of watching their reflexions in the stream beneath them. The details of the scene bear many resemblances to the description of the shepherd's retreat in Book II of the *Georgics* (467-74) ; and the lines that follow (57-97) are quite clearly an early study of the whole passage in the *Georgics* (458-531) in which the happiness of the countryman is contrasted with the unhealthy and pretentious luxury of the town. The opening lines will show its purpose :—

How good the shepherd's blessings if untaught
And uncorrupt, he scorns not humble ways !
Dreams that no luxury knows refresh his sleep
And laugh at cares that wring the miser's heart.

O bona pastoris, si quis non pauperis usum
mente prius docta fastidiat, et probet illi
somnia luxuriae spretis incognita curis
quae lacerant auidas inimico pectore mentes.

After the shepherd and the delights of his work have been put before us, we follow him to the midday watering of the sheep :—

The wandering flock
Move slowly¹ at his summons to the shoal
Beneath the whispering spring, the clear blue pool
Under green banks asleep in mossy shade.

Note here again how the boy-poet revels in colour. When the sheep are all safe from the sun, the shepherd finds a place for his own siesta ; the wood, we learn, was that in which a queen of tragedy rested after the terrible madness in which she had slain her own son, Pentheus ; it is a place where the wild-gods of the hillside join the nymphs of the trees and of the springs in dance and song, so that the river Peneus itself stops to listen to them. Every one of the trees has its colour and its story, and at the climax of the description the different colours and shapes are interwoven in a wonderful scheme of decoration which, if I am not mistaken, Tennyson has copied in his description of *Enone's bower*. The wood is full of birds ; their twitterings, and the splash of the spring with its echoes, and the chirp of the grasshoppers in the heat, and the touch of the whispering breeze in the tree-tops, all lull the shepherd to sleep ; the epithets describing his careless slumber are intentionally repeated from the passage describing rustic life. But now the plot begins to thicken ; the shepherd asleep, the second character appears. A great serpent comes to cool himself in some soft pool. I need hardly say that he is furnished with all the colours that the most respectable, indeed distinguished, serpent could desire to appear in ; his eyes are fiery, his tongue quivers, and his crest is splendidly erect. He is indignant that some man has come to a pool which he counted his own, and he poises to attack him. The sleeper's hours seem numbered, but help is at hand. A little gnat in pity rouses him to escape the danger, planting her² sting full in the middle of the shepherd's forehead— if that is the meaning of a rather corrupt line— ; the shepherd wakes, but in anger, and kills the gnat. Then seeing the serpent he at first retreats, but soon plucks a bough from a tree and beats the snake to death ; so ends the first half of the poem. But that night

¹ Reading *reptabant* with Heinsius.

² In Latin *culex* is masculine, but nothing shall shake my conviction that in English *gnat* is (or ought to be) feminine.

when the shepherd has put his flock to rest amid the shadows and fallen asleep himself, he is visited by the ghost of the gnat, who reproaches him for the ingratitude which she has suffered :—

Because I counted your life dearer than my own I am now the sport of the winds in empty places. You are resting at ease in happy sleep, saved from bitter calamity ; but my form is driven across the waves of Lethe by the powers of the world below.

After this brief preface the gnat, or at all events her poet, takes advantage of the Shepherd's sleeping hours to give him a picture, in 150 lines, of the underworld to which she is now condemned. One must confess that the little creature has made a very good use of her time ; for having only left the upper world after midday, by nine or ten o'clock at night she is prepared to lecture with eloquence and feeling on all the things and persons that are to be found in the region she has newly entered. This incongruity once granted, we must, I think, admit that the vision is arranged with no small skill and with flashes of real poetry which give promise of the power with which the poet later on handled the same themes. First of all come Tisiphone and Cerberus ; then the penalties of the wicked ; on which the gnat naïvely remarks that the sight of other people's misery makes her forget her own, a touch which, if it is boyish, is also thoroughly Vergilian. The gnat adds, if the text and its apparent interpretation can be trusted, that she is willing to suffer the penalty again if she may have some opportunity of doing other like service. Among the criminals we have some of the figures familiar to us in the great vision of the *Aeneid*, with others for whom later on Vergil found no place.¹ Then we pass by a brief transition to Elysium, where Persephone leads a procession of maidens in honour of the noble women who abide there. It is an interesting feature in the boyish picture ; there are women among the Blessed—Alcestis, Penelope, Eurydice. At sixteen he admitted women, properly qualified of course, to the full franchise of Elysium ; but, alas, after thirty years' experience he could find no women whom he cared to admit—at all events none by name—to any part of the afterworld save the mourning plains of Limbo. And then follows the story of Eurydice in a brief twenty-five lines, full of points which both remind us of the richer treatment of the story

¹ Otus and Ephialtes are added, Sisyphus and the Danaids, Medea and Procne, Eteocles and Polynices.

in the Fourth Book of the *Georgics* and disappoint us in the comparison—and yet lines, I venture to say, which if they had not been so far transcended would have been treasured as themselves not unworthy of a true poet. The passage is too long to render here. Let us notice only the end where Eurydice is described as

'faithfully carrying out the bidding of the gods and not moving her eyes or speaking; but Orpheus was more cruel, who in his hunger for a dear kiss broke the divine command. 'Twas a love that claimed forgiveness, a gentle fault, if Tartarus had but known.'

dignus amor uenia; gratum, si Tartara noscent,
peccatum; meminisse graue est.

Here we have the original of a wonderful line in the later version;
cum subito incautum dementia cepit amantem,
ignoscenda quidem, scirent si ignoscere Manes.

A sudden madness seized the unheeding lover,
Worthy forgiveness, if Hell could forgive.

Then we pass to the manly heroes, first the Greeks, Peleus and Telamon, then Ulysses and his comrades, and then many Trojans, who avoid the Greeks even in Elysium. This abiding enmity is a feature reproduced from the Homeric underworld; but in Vergil's more mature conception it is retained only in the shades of Limbo; in his Elysium all enmity is blotted out; there is no night there. The mention of Agamemnon suggests the fate of his comrades who were shipwrecked, in some twenty lines. But by this time the gnat is beginning to be a little ashamed, or, at all events, afraid, of her own learning, and concludes her revelation by a ten-line-catalogue of Roman heroes. Here again we have anticipations of the Sixth Book of the *Aeneid*, and one or two figures for whom later on Vergil had no room, such as Horatius, Curtius, and Mucius Scaevola. Last of all come the Scipios

Whose conquering name the walls of ruined Carthage
Beneath their doom of weeds still shudder at.

And so the gnat passes from the happy lot of these immortal heroes to her own misfortune and again reproaches the shepherd for his cruelty, finally, however, invoking upon him not, like most other ghosts, a curse, but a gentle blessing. 'I depart never to see thee more; but do thou dwell happy beside thy stream and the green forest land and the pastures.' After so kind a visit the shepherd is

struck with remorse, and rears a great tomb of earth and grassy sods in honour of the gnat, planting it with a crowd of wonderful flowers, and setting upon it an inscription saying that the shepherd offers to the gnat this tomb in gratitude for her having saved his life. So the poem ends in a garden of colour and fragrance, warm with the gratitude paid by a human member of creation to a tiny non-human creature who had sacrificed herself for his sake. Will any reader of the *Georgics*, I wonder, venture to say that all this is not Vergil through and through?

But perhaps some hard-headed critic may reply, "After all, can this boyish stuff, however playful its purpose, be really attributed to a master-poet? Need we think that Vergil was the author of so many weak lines, so many descents into mere prose?" Let me then first remind you that Vergil himself did all he could to suppress the *Culex*, and indeed the whole of his youthful work; and then compare the case of Tennyson, who suppressed many thousand¹ lines. So we learn from his son, who in his biography prints among other specimens a poem called *Anacaona*. It is worth while, I think, to reproduce two or three stanzas of this juvenile work, which is quite comparable to the feebler parts of the *Culex*.

A dark Indian maiden,
Warbling in the bloom'd liana,
Stepping lightly flower-laden,
By the crimson-eyed anana,
Wantoning in orange groves
Naked, and dark-limbed, and gay,
Bathing in the slumbrous coves,
In the cocoa-shadow'd coves,
Of sunbright Xaraguay,
Who was so happy as Anacaona,
The beauty of Espagnola,
The golden flower of Hayti?

All her loving childhood
Breezes from the palm and canna
Fann'd this queen of the green wildwood,
Lady of the green Savannah;
All day long with laughing eyes,
Dancing by a palmy bay,

¹ He mentions in a letter, quoted in the Biography (p. 10), one boyish epic which alone contained 6000.

In the wooded paradise,
Of still Xaraguay;
None were so happy as Anacaona,
The beauty of Espagnola,
The golden flower of Hayti!

In the purple island,
Crown'd with garlands of cinchona,
Lady over wood and highland,
The Indian queen, Anacaona,
Dancing on the blossomy plain
To a woodland melody;
Playing with the scarlet crane,
The dragon-fly and scarlet crane,
Beneath the papao tree!
Happy, happy was Anacaona,
The beauty of Espagnola,
The golden flower of Hayti!

Yet this facile Muse grew into the power which inspired *The Passing of Arthur*, and *In Memoriam*.

If we turn to the positive evidence for the authenticity of the *Culex*, no reasonable person can, I think, remain in doubt. In the first place, as Mr. J. W. Mackail rightly says,¹ "the external evidence for the Vergilian authorship is so good, that but for internal considerations it would be accepted without question". Martial twice attributes a poem of this name to Vergil (VIII, 56, *qui modo uix Culicem fleuerat ore rudi*; and XIV, 185). Suetonius in his *Life of Lucan* (Reifferscheid, p. 50) quotes a saying of that poet comparing his own youthful work to the *Culex*; Donatus in his *Life of Vergil*, states that Vergil wrote it when he was sixteen years old; and then goes on to describe the story of the poem just as we have it, quoting the last two lines. Statius makes Calliope prophesy (*Siluae* II, 7, 73), that Lucan will write his poem on the death of Pompey at a younger age than Vergil's when he wrote the *Culex*; and in the Preface to Book I of the *Siluae*, he appeals to the example of this poem, saying that 'there is none of the great poets who has not preluded his works by some compositions in lighter style'. Mr. Mackail adds justly that "in a matter of this sort, Statius, who was not only a scholar and poet but a profound student and positive worshipper of Vergil, could hardly be mistaken. That the poem

¹ *Class. Rev.* XXII. 1908, p. 72.

known to Statius was a different one from the poem which we possess there is not the slightest ground for supposing."

But the internal evidence, which has been recently collected, is even more conclusive. No less than eighty definite resemblances between the *Culex* and Vergil's acknowledged work have been traced¹ by Miss Elizabeth Jackson, Faulkner Fellow of the University of Manchester; and even that list does not exhaust the points that might be cited. Let me quote here a few examples of the kind of resemblance which have carried absolute conviction to my mind. I started with great unwillingness to regard the poem as Vergilian, mainly because of the lightness of the treatment and the overfluency of decoration, so unlike the depth of suggestion which is perhaps the most wonderful of all the characteristics of the poetry of Vergil's prime.

- (1) *nec faciles Ditis sine iudice sedes,
iudice qui uitae post mortem uindicat acta.*

(*Cul.* 275.)

nec uero hae sine sorte datae, sine iudice sedes.
(*Aen.* VI. 431.)

- (2) *non Hellespontus pedibus pulsatus equorum.*
(*Cul.* 33.)

*demens! qui nimbos et non imitabile fulmen
aere et cornipedum pulsu simularat equorum.*
(*Aen.* VI. 590-1.)

- (3) *si non Assyrio feruent bis lauta colore
Attalicens opibus data vellera. . . .*
(*Cul.* 62.)

alba neque Assyrio fucatur lana ueneno
(*Georg.* II. 465.)

The whole passage in the *Georgics* shows repeated resemblances; and the relation between the two, and their common kinship to a Lucretian episode (II, 14 ff.) are carefully discussed by Miss Jackson (l.c.).

- (4) *et piger aurato procedit Vesper ab Oeta.*
(*Cul.* 203.)

et inuito processit Vesper Olympo.
(*Ecl.* VI. 86.)

- (5) *ad Stygias reuocatus aquas. uix ultimus amni
extat nectareas diuom qui prodidit escas.*
(*Cul.* 240.)

*tu Stygias inhumatus aquas amnemque seuerum
Eumenidum aspicias.*
(*Aen.* VI. 374.)

¹ *Class. Quarterly*, v. 1911, p. 163.

- (6) aduersas praeferre faces.
funereasque inferre faces.
(*Cul.* 262.)
(*Aen.* VII. 337.)
- (7) gramineam ut uiridi foderet de caespite terram
iam memor inceptum peragens sibi cura laborem
congestum cumulauit opus.
(*Cul.* 393.)
pauperis et tuguri congestum caespite culmen.
(*Ecl.* I. 68.)

"Such soft echoes of sound are peculiarly important; they would hardly occur to a mere imitator, but they might well linger in the mind of the poet who first conceived them. If Vergil did not write the *Culex*, it would seem that he must at all events have known it by heart for a long period of years".¹

That the preface of the poem was written before 44 B.C. is beyond doubt,² and we shall soon see that 50 B.C. is a more probable date. It follows that these resemblances between it and the undoubted poems of Vergil (which are all later than that date) cannot be due to imitation of these poems by the author of the *Culex*, but must imply an intimate acquaintance with the *Culex* on the part of Vergil himself. It may reasonably, therefore, be asked of those who think that the poem is quite unworthy of Vergil—it is, of course, unworthy of his maturity—whether he would have been likely to give careful attention to such a poem—so careful, in fact, as to have learnt it almost by heart. No one, I think, will be inclined to differ from Dr. Warde Fowler, perhaps the weightiest and most conservative authority in this country on the study of Vergil, when he writes³: "It seems to me to have been proved by Miss Jackson that the poem is an early work of Vergil".

Being now in possession of the general content and character of this poem we may turn to the interesting biographical questions connected with the circumstances of its composition and its dedication to someone called Octavius. The third part⁴ of the Preface (ll. 24-41) begins thus:—

¹ Miss E. Jackson, l.c. p. 169.

² See, e.g. Skutsch, *Aus Vergils Frühzeit*, p. 134.

³ *Class. Rev.* XXVIII. 1914, p. 119.

⁴ The threefold division has already been noticed, p. 12 footnote.

'And do you in whom my confidence is fixed, if only what is written be worthy enough, revered child of the Octavian house, come like some bird of good omen to speed my attempt. Come innocent boy, for this page sings to you of no dire warfare like the conflict between Jove and the giants.'

Who was this Octavius? Why was the poem dedicated to him, and why especially on the ground of its having a peaceful subject? It is to be a gentle theme told in unambitious verse, fit for his own powers if Phoebus will but guide him; that is to say, in the language of prose, the poet is choosing a subject which most people would think too humble for poetry.

The preface concludes with a prayer which is in many ways characteristic, that glory of this kind (i.e. of an interest in such subjects) may rest for ever like a shining crown upon his forehead, that he may always have a place in a home of honour and affection (*sede pia*), and that the unharmed life of security, which is his due, may be the theme of men's gratitude through many happy years shining in prosperity. We may fairly ask whether any poet but Vergil in that age, would have composed such a blessing? The repetition of the word *lucens*, 'shining' is a mark of Vergil's taste; and the desire for the child, that he should be in *pia sede*, is not less Vergilian; while the closing wish that he shall earn men's gratitude, is the crown which Vergil sets upon the highest group of the souls whom he places in Elysium, those who by good service have made at least some few remember them.

quique sui memores aliquos fecere merendo
(*Aen.* VI. 664).

Dr. Warde Fowler's conclusion¹ can hardly be resisted. "The Octavius to whom the poem is dedicated was the future Augustus. There is one other possible candidate for the honour (see Leo's edition, p. 22), but there is an almost universal agreement that the language of these lines forbids us to think of any boy but the nephew of the dictator Julius Caesar."

But now mark what follows from this. Let me quote Dr. Warde Fowler again:—

"All this dedication seems to me to suggest that Octavius was very young, a *puer* in the strict sense of the word. He is asked to

¹ *Class. Rev.* XXVIII. 1914, p. 119.

accept the poem because the theme is not warlike but homely. His whole life is before him : he has as yet done nothing heroic, and is, indeed, not of an age to listen to tales of war and bloodshed ; nay, the poet seems to suggest a hope that he may live to be a man of peace. I cannot think that such a poem, with such a dedication, could have been addressed to Octavius after he had taken his *toga virilis*. That event¹ took place on October 18, 48 B.C. . . . The epithets *sanctus* and *uenerandus* are mainly suggested by the tender age and innocence of the boy. I am ready to accept the view that they are rendered still more appropriate by the fact that this boy was the nephew of the governor of Cisalpine Gaul, to whom the Transpadani, with the poet's family beyond doubt among them, had long been looking up as their political champion.

" . . . If we could be sure that the two boys had already met when the dedication was written, we should also be justified in seeing a characteristic Vergilian tenderness in these words ; for Octavius, if we may trust the famous bust, was a beautiful and discreet boy, and the poet's love for all young creatures was marked ; Euryalus, Lausus, Pallas—has any poet ever touched with such pure tenderness of feeling the most beautiful types of boyhood in portraits such as these ? I am inclined to think that Vergil and Octavius may actually have met in the year 50 B.C., when the elder was about twenty and the younger thirteen. At the end of the eighth book of the 'De Bello Gallico' Hirtius tells us that Cæsar came to Cisalpine Gaul early in that year, and was busy canvassing in the province ; also that he was received in the Transpadane part of the province, to which the poet's family belonged, with great acclaim, and was feted wherever he went.² We are not told that he summoned his nephew from Rome to spend the summer with him. But Octavius was the one hope of the family, and Romans like Cicero and Cæsar felt tenderly towards the boys in whom they placed their hopes, and wished to see them after long absence, like our Indian parents of to-day.

" It is pleasant to think it quite possible that Vergil may have seen

¹ This appears to me to render completely untenable the view suggested by Robinson Ellis (*Cl. Rev.* x. 1896, p. 182) that the poem dated from 45-44. But the very interesting links between the scene of ll. 109-156 and the Thesprotian region, with which Robinson Ellis was mainly concerned in that article, deserve fuller investigation.

² Cum liberis omnis multitudo obuam procedebat.

Octavius at Mantua, or even talked with him. In any case, I would suggest that this year 50 B.C. is a likely one for the date of the dedication, though the poem as a whole may have been composed earlier, perhaps when the lad Vergil was only sixteen, as Donatus tells us in his life of the poet."

To this I venture to add a few lines from the postscript which Dr. Fowler allowed me to append to the article just quoted : " It seems most probable, indeed almost necessary, to suppose that in the Transpadane country Cæsar would have met so able and important a landowner as Vergil's father. Anyone who has been at Pietole must realize what a sweep of country is described in the Ninth Eclogue (7-9).¹ Speaking from memory, I should think that this would mean an extent of not less than ten miles at whatever point of the compass the *colles* may be located. The support of such a man, especially as his prosperity was not more conspicuous than his knowledge of agriculture and of bee-keeping and his enthusiasm for learning, was just such a source of strength as the enlightened Julius would be most anxious to draw to his own side ; and knowing what we do of the relation between Vergil and his father, from almost every book of the *Aeneid*, who can doubt that the old man would have seized every opportunity of putting the shy and lovable genius of the lad into as close touch as he could with the great and god-like patron of the Transpadanes ?

" Altogether it appears to me that the picture which Dr. Warde Fowler conjures up of the big boy Vergil taking the little boy Octavius round the Mantuan farm and showing him, to their common delight, all the creatures and places to which he himself was equally attached as boy, farmer, and poet, is one of the probabilities far too good not to be true."

In any case we may regard it, I think, as established beyond any doubt that Vergil and Octavius were acquainted before the future emperor was fifteen years old.

Let us turn in conclusion to two of the poems (VII and X) in the

¹ qua se subducere colles
incipiunt mollique iugum demittere cliuo
usque ad aquam.

This argument of course depends on the trustworthiness of the tradition connecting the modern Pietole with the ancient Andes.

small collection known as the "Katalepton". These two have been almost universally acknowledged as genuine, although it must be confessed that some of their surroundings in the collection are quite un-Vergilian. Both of them contain the name of the Epicurean philosopher, Siro, whom we know from Suetonius as Vergil's teacher, and whom he regarded with veneration. The later of the two poems sprang from the misfortune that befell Vergil and his father in the Civil War; for when they were expelled from their own ample estate they took refuge in the small country house with the modest ground attached that had once belonged to Siro, and 'by him had been counted great riches'. The other, which is worth considering in full, marks an interesting epoch in the poet's inward history. It records the impressions with which he left school and parted from the two branches of education which were then in chief vogue at Rome, viz. rhetoric and grammar; and also how it seemed his duty to bid good-bye, or almost good-bye, to his chief delight, that of writing poetry, because he felt it laid upon him to be a philosopher.

Ite hinc, inanes, ite, rhetorum ampullæ,
inflata rore non Achaico uerba,
et uos, Selique Tarquitique Varroque,
scholasticorum natio madens pingui,
ite hinc, inane cymbalon iuuentutis.
tuque, o mearum cura, Sexte, curarum,
uale, Sabine; iam ualete, formosi.
nos ad beatos uela mittimus portus,
magni petentes docta dicta Sironis,
uitamque ab omni uindicabimus cura.
ite hinc, Camenæ, uos quoque ite iam,—sane
dulces Camenæ; nam fatebimur uerum,
dulces fuistis: et tamen meas chartas
reuisitote, sed pudenter et raro.

Begone, ye barren flowers of speech,
The stuff that rhetoricians teach,
Big words by Attic wit ungraced;
And you, dull tribe of ample waist,
Whose barren joy it is to hammer
Young heads with ding-dong rules of grammar;
You too, my friend of friends, good-bye!
No more to your fair class come I;
But setting sail 'neath sterner skies,
And seeking havens of the wise,

Great Siro's lofty lore I'll hear
And ransom life from every fear.
Away, ye Muses, yes, away!
Though playmates dear, ye must not stay.
And yet, ah! yet,—steal back again,
Just modestly, just now and then.

In this boyish poem we see Vergil in his first love for philosophy, a love directed to a very different side of that protean creature from the severe and sober Stoicism which claimed him in the end. One can well believe that the lines bidding farewell to his fellow-school-boys—a farewell which refers merely to the end of their daily companionship in study—were very likely written when Vergil was fresh from reading the whole of Lucretius' poem, *De Rerum Natura*, in which, as we all know, the poet-philosopher, while embracing the ethical teaching of Epicurus, worked out his physical system into a heroic and often brilliantly successful attempt at a scientific setting forth of the laws of the universe. This poem was published after its author's death in 55 B.C., when Vergil was fifteen; and in writing the *Culex*, some time before 50 B.C. (very likely in 54), Vergil had shown that he was familiar¹ with the easier parts of it. In the years that followed we may conjecture that he had mastered the more technical part, and had felt the glow of admiration for the author which even now fills the mind of every reader who comes fresh to its wonderful attack upon difficult problems. Who can doubt that Vergil hoped, as every young philosopher does when his enthusiasm is first kindled, that he might live to out-do his master and himself to penetrate somehow to the great secret of the universe? That is what he means by *beatos portus* 'the happy havens of the wise'.

But how was this to be done? What path was the young philosopher to follow? Remember the date—55 to 50 B.C.—the years of a steadily darkening horizon in the political world, when the shadow of the most gigantic of the Civil Wars that even Rome had suffered was deepening month by month; the years in which active politicians went about Italy, sometimes even in Rome, with gangs of hired cut-throats to protect themselves from violence and practise it on their opponents; years of which a lurid picture has

¹ See, e.g. p. 19, the third example.

been drawn for us in Cicero's defence of Milo. Now, as I think Dr. Warde Fowler has pointed out, the day-to-day, hand-to-mouth philosophy of pleasure, which says "eat and drink as happily as you may, for to-morrow we shall probably die," has never found much favour among men except in epochs when the framework of society has been loosened and when regular occupation, property, family-ties, and life itself have all become precarious. In such times men's working faith in the steadiness of the universe, in the existence of a good providence, is shaken; and old-fashioned principles corresponding to the ordinary conduct of life in settled periods (the *prisca supercilia* of the *Copa*, l. 34) sound hollow and impossible. The connexion of these two ideas is very clear all through Lucretius' poem; amidst the horrors of political life, nature still provides her simple pleasures for anyone who will take them without question and without vain dreams of avarice and ambition or cruel dreams of power. It is under the influence of this teaching that we find Vergil very soon after his poetry begins.

The charming elegiac poem called *Copa*, or Mine Hostess, which is full of Vergilian beauties of language¹ and scenery, gives us a vivid picture of the Epicurean creed at its best. I had hoped to be able to include some account of it; but time forbids. Notice only the ending. After enumerating the delights of rest in the garden of her wayside hostelry and bidding the tired, dusty wayfarer come and taste them, the hostess ends with a brief and sudden touch of solemnity in the last line:—

Mors aurem uellens, Viuite, ait, uenio.

'Death plucks your ear and cries, Live now, I come'.

After all, that is the end of every Epicurean sermon, and it is a text of which men are apt to grow rather tired; such stimulus as it gives is very soon spent. In the agony of the Civil Wars the youth

¹ Among the more formal points of Vergilian style may be mentioned the half-plaintive introductory question *Quid inuat* (l. 5, cf. *Aen.* II. 776); the repetition of *est* (ll. 20-21, cf. *Georg.* IV. 387, *Aen.* VI. 792, IX. 205); and among more substantial likenesses *rumpunt arbusta cicadae* (l. 27, cf. *Georg.* III. 327); *prolue uitro* (l. 29, cf. *Aen.* I. 739); and the construction *suaue rubentia* (l. 19, cf. e.g. *Aen.* VI. 201). The riddle which Mr. J. W. Mackail leaves unsolved (*Latin Literature*, p. 105) may perhaps be answered in some degree by regarding the poem as a study of the Epicurean creed.

of Rome went through an even crueller though less ennobling discipline than that to which the youth of Europe has now suddenly been called. Childish things were put away because, in the end, they must be, and with them the pleasure-philosophy of Epicurus. The condition of society which had at first encouraged its growth, at length had crushed it by sheer weight of misery. In ten dreadful years from 50-40 B.C. the Epicurean view of life proved an empty consolation to hearts broken by anarchy and carnage. But at the end of those ten years there rose some faint hope—the hope of a new and peaceful world born from mighty travail, to be governed by the offspring of the Octavius to whom Vergil's boyish poem had been dedicated. In Eclogue IV, which was to celebrate the birth of a child to Augustus, a poem written in Vergil's thirtieth year, we find a transition from the materialistic despondency of Lucretius to a combination of the Epicurean sense of the intrinsic beauty and sweetness of the natural world with a deeper, more ethical conception of man's work within it. Read from this point of view, even that famous Eclogue will be found to possess new interest. But there is a well-known passage in which Vergil takes a step farther; the great lines (*Georg.* II, 458-540) written probably some time between his thirty-third and thirty-ninth years, in which he expresses his still admiring reverence for Lucretius, but goes on to declare his own new and deeper conviction. By this time the Epicurean teaching holds definitely the second place in Vergil's thoughts. He will take all the knowledge that its science can give; but the key to life is not there; it is in piety, in hard work, in gratitude to mysterious superhuman powers, and, above all, in wonder, wonder at the undying mystery of smiling and frowning skies, of love and pain, of life and death.

Happy indeed is he whose skill can find
The cause of each and all things, mastering so
Fear and stern Fate, and hearing undismayed
The hungry roar of Death's advancing flood.
Yet not unblest that other, who has learnt
To know the sacred creatures of the woods,
Pan with his pipe, and hoary old Silvanus
And all the fairy sisterhood at play.
Nought cares he for the pomp of crowds and courts.
Rome rises, kingdoms fall, he works unmoved.
He views the rich and knows no pang of envy,
Succours the poor without a grudging thought.

Far from the clash of arms, the just, kind earth
Pours out before him plentiful reward;
Peace without fear, a life of solid truth
Full of a thousand pleasures,—open fields
Free air and moving waters, cliffs and woods,
Cool mountain valleys, herds of lowing kine,
Soft lawns and bowers where sunburnt shepherds rest.

